

The Sick Lion and the Ass

Jonathan Swift

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A lion sunk by time's decay,
Too feeble grown to hunt his prey,
Observed his fatal hour draw nigh:
He drooped and laid him down to die.
There came by chance a savage boar,
Who trembled oft to hear him roar,
But when he saw him thus distressed
He tore and gored his royal breast.
A bull came next (ungen'rous foe),
Rejoiced to find him fall'n so low,
And with his horny-armed head
He aimed at once to strike him dead,
He strikes, he wounds, he shocks in vain,
The lion still conceals his pain.
At length a base inglorious ass,
Who saw so many insults pass,
Came up and kicked him in the side:
'Twas this that raised the lion's pride.
He roused, and thus he spoke at length,
For indignation gave him strength:
Thou sorry, stupid, sluggish creature,
Disgrace and shame and scorn of nature!
You saw how well I could dispense
With blows from beasts of consequence!
They dignified the wounds they gave;
For none complain who feel the brave.
But you, the lowest of all brutes,
How ill your face with courage suits!
What dullness in thy looks appears!
I'd rather far (by heav'n 'tis true)
Expire by these than live by you:
A kick from thee is double death
I curse thee with my dying breath!

The Moral

Rebukes are easy from our betters,
From men of quality and letters;
But when low dunces will affront,
What man alive can stand the brunt?

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